



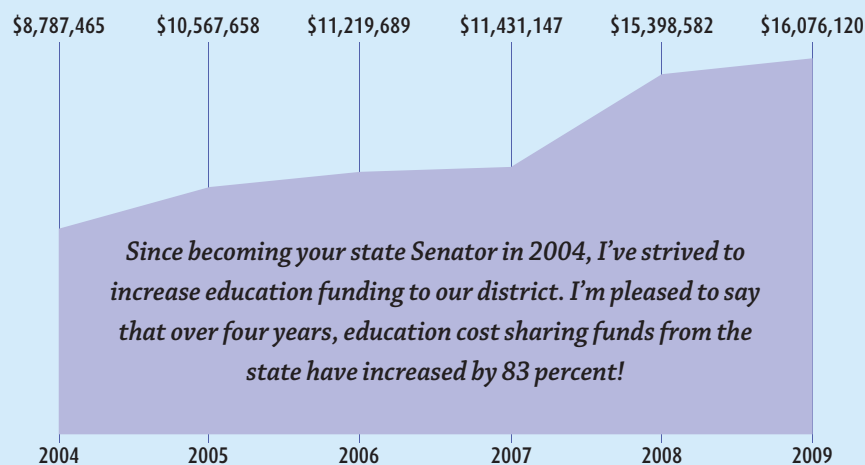
Family Legislator of the Year Award

Earlier this spring, I was honored to receive the “Family Legislator of the Year” award by the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA,) a statewide network of independent, nonprofit, family service agencies that deliver services from over 90 offices located throughout the state. I’m very proud of be the 20th recipient of this annual award, joining an illustrious group of Democrats and Republicans who have been recognized for going “above and beyond their commitment to Connecticut’s families.”

RECEIVING THE 2008 FAMILY LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

From left: Robert Cashel, Chair of CCFSA; Daniel O’Connell, President & CEO of CCFSA; Galo Rodriguez, President & CEO, The Village for Families and Children; myself; Anne Danaher, Executive Director, and Richard Glassman, President, Jewish Family Services of Greater Hartford.

5th District Education Funding on an Upward Trend



Tougher Requirements, Education for Teen Drivers

Communities across the state are grieving over the loss of young lives in tragic automobile accidents. The legislature made several changes this year to help prevent fatal accidents involving teenage drivers and passengers. Teens are now required to spend more time behind the wheel before they can get a driver’s license and they cannot drive with passengers under age 18, who are not immediate family, for a year. Teens will also face harsh penalties—including license suspensions—for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, reckless driving, speeding, street racing and using a cell phone while driving. I was proud to join Governor Rell at Conard High School in West Hartford when she signed this important legislation into law.



Dear Neighbor:

By almost any measure, the nation is in a recession, and states across America are feeling the effects.

Connecticut faces these uncertain times with a biennial budget that makes important investments in local schools, roads, health care, school readiness, municipal aid, criminal justice programs, and other vital needs.

However, state revenue forecasts continue to drop, and just as Connecticut’s families are tightening their belts, so must our state government. While we held the line on any new spending during this past legislative session, we were still able to find ways to help the people of our state by enacting long-needed reforms in our criminal justice system, health care, consumer protection, and the environment.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Harris
State Senator

Fighting the High Cost of Gasoline & Energy

We all know that the cost of fuel is sky-high—affecting how much you pay for gas and groceries. While we can’t stop fuel prices from rising, we can prevent tax increases from further driving up the cost. This June, we said NO to a scheduled increase in the gross receipts tax. By blocking this tax hike, we’re hoping to save you a few cents on each gallon, and that adds up. We’re also taking action to help seniors and working families survive the high cost of the looming home heating oil season.



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State Senator
Jonathan Harris
5TH DISTRICT



LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

Global Warming Solutions

Connecticut has once again shown that it is a leader in environmental protection with the passage of a bill that creates a timeline and targets through 2050 for Connecticut to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. “An Act Concerning Connecticut Global Warming Solutions” unanimously passed the Senate after overwhelming passage in the House. The new law requires Connecticut to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to at least 10 percent below 1990 levels by January 1, 2020, and to at least 80 percent below 2001 levels by January 1, 2050. It is estimated that in 1990, Connecticut emitted 45 million metric tons of greenhouse gases. Most of these gases are the result of burning fossil fuels for transportation, although electric generation and residential energy use also contribute heavily.



Cracking Down on Hate Crimes

Last year, Connecticut suffered through a rash of racist, intimidating noose incidents. A black Coast Guard Academy cadet found a noose in his luggage and, months later, another noose was left in the office of a Coast Guard race relations officer. A half-dozen nooses were found at construction sites in Stamford and West Hartford and in a West Hartford home improvement store. Another noose was left under the patrol car of a black Bridgeport police officer. Nooses are a repugnant symbol of racial hatred rooted in the lynching of black Americans. This session, the General Assembly unanimously passed, and Governor Rell signed, legislation that makes it a hate crime—on par with cross burning—to hang a noose on public or private property with the intent to intimidate or harass another person.

Closing Sexual Offender Loopholes

There are nearly 5,000 sex offenders living in Connecticut. The state’s sex offender Web site averages over 1 million visits per year from concerned parents and others seeking to keep their loved ones safe. The General Assembly is doing its part by passing a bill that prohibits a sex offender from changing his or her name without first notifying the public safety commissioner, and by requiring the sex offender to sign a sworn affidavit that they are not seeking to avoid the legal consequences of their criminal conviction. Regardless of any possible name change, all sex offenders must still provide the state police with their name, address, date of birth, and other personal information.

Allowing Seniors to Receive Care at Home

Many seniors who require long-term care would prefer to receive that care in their own home or with a relative caregiver. For many, that is not an option due to Medicaid reimbursement rules. A federal program called ‘Money Follows the Person’ allows Medicaid funds to ‘follow the patient’ from nursing homes to more personalized settings. The state program can currently enroll 700 seniors, but we expanded the program to accommodate up to 5,000. The state’s reimbursement rate for those in the program will climb from 50 to 75 percent for each enrollee. Instead of putting this money back into the General Fund, we have established a separate account to reinvest in long-term care services. We also started a new program to prevent people from prematurely entering nursing homes.



Prohibiting Unfair Nursing Home Fees

Under existing law, cable and telephone companies and nursing home operators can charge their residents installation fees if they move from one room to another in the same facility. This practice is unfair to nursing home residents, who are frequently asked or forced to change rooms and who then have to pay these fees. Our seniors often live on limited means, and nursing home residents should not have to worry about a heavy charge from their phone or cable company when asked to change rooms. I supported legislation that makes it illegal for a nursing home or a service provider to charge these fees when a resident moves to a different room in the same facility.

Veterans Benefits

We continue to recognize the sacrifices made by veterans and military personnel from Connecticut and their families. The General Assembly approved a bill to enhance unemployment benefits for spouses if they voluntarily leave their jobs because their military spouse has been relocated. Legislation was also approved to provide additional educational opportunities for certain veterans and their families. One measure requires the state-run institutions of higher education to offer tuition waivers for any state resident who is a dependent or surviving spouse of an active-duty military member who was killed in action after September 11, 2001. In addition, the tuition waiver for veterans will be expanded to include graduate school tuition for National Guard members beginning July 1, 2008.



Toy Safety

Protecting the health and safety of the children in Connecticut will always be a major priority. We approved legislation to protect our children from the rising number of unsafe toys that may be contaminated with hazardous materials. It bans children’s toys and other products if they fail to comply with stricter limits for lead and prohibits the sale of items marketed for children that contain asbestos. Connecticut stores must also post notices to inform consumers of recalled products and maintain reports detailing how recalled products were returned to the manufacturer or destroyed.



Autism Legislation

Despite autism being the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States, there is still not enough support for those who are affected by it. This legislative session, I helped to pass a series of bills that will improve the quality of life for autistic children and give their caregivers more support. One new law

requires education officials to develop a statewide plan to incorporate methods of teaching children with autism into programs, requirements, and training. Another calls for health insurance companies to cover therapy services for those with autism and provides support for people and their families who may not be eligible for state services.

CHILDREN'S PRODUCT SAFETY LEGISLATION

In January, I spoke at a press conference at the Toy Chest in West Hartford where I announced the Senate Democrats’ plan to introduce legislation putting teeth behind recalls of children’s products, including toys (see article to left). On my right is Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams, and on my left is Tracy Gamester, a West Hartford parent.

